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VACANT BUILDING REGISTRATION ORDINANCE

- Frequently Asked Questions -

Q: When did this ordinance go into effect?

A: The ordinance went into effect on June 14, 2009.

Q: Why did the city of Crystal adopt this ordinance?

A: To protect the public health, safety and welfare. The City Council determined that vacant buildings are a major cause and source of blight in residential and non-residential neighborhoods, especially when the owner or responsible party of the building fails to actively maintain and manage the building to ensure it does not become a liability to the neighborhood.

Q: What are some of the impacts associated with vacant buildings that the ordinance can address?

A: Vacant buildings often attract transients, homeless people, trespassers and criminals, including drug abusers. Neglect of vacant buildings, as well as use of vacant buildings by transients and criminals, creates a risk of fire, explosion or flooding for the vacant building and adjacent properties. Vacant properties often are used as dumping grounds for junk and debris and often are overgrown with weeds and grass. Vacant buildings that are boarded to prevent entry by transients and other long-term vacancies discourage economic development and retard appreciation of property values.

Q: Doesn't the city already enforce its existing ordinances to get such issues taken care of?

A: The city continuously investigates and abates violations at vacant properties but at a substantial cost to the city. With adoption of this ordinance, the City Council has determined that the costs associated with achieving compliance at vacant properties should not be borne by the general taxpayers of the community and those who maintain their properties but, rather, by those who choose to leave their buildings vacant.

Q: What constitutes a "vacant building?"

A: The ordinance considers a building to be vacant if no person actually and currently conducts lawful business or lawfully resides in any part of the building on a permanent, nontransient basis in accordance with the Crystal zoning ordinance.

Q: When must a property owner register a vacant building?

A: *When a residential, commercial or industrial building has been vacant for more than 30 days. The registration is valid for one year from the date of issuance. The property owner must secure a new registration annually if the building remains vacant.*

Q: How do I register a vacant building?

A: *Fill out a Vacant Building Registration application form, complete a Vacant Building Property Plan, and pay the \$500 annual registration fee.*

Q: What constitutes a “Vacant Building Property Plan?”

A: *The Property Plan identifies the owner’s plans for the building, its status, and the measures in place to ensure that the building is secured and that the building and property will be maintained in compliance with applicable city codes.*

Q: Are there exemptions to vacant building registration:

A: *1. Extended vacationers or snowbirds – A resident on an extended vacation or alternative living arrangement, including over winter months, with the intention to return to the property and live is exempt from registration. However, a verified emergency contact number of the property owner or a responsible party must be provided and the property must be maintained by a local person/agent so it does not appear vacant.*
2. Fire damaged property – A building that has suffered fire damage is exempt from registration if the cleanup, repair or demolition is completed within 90 days from the date of the fire and if the exemption is requested in writing.
3. Any multi-tenant building on a single parcel that has one or more occupants – Vacant tenant spaces within larger commercial or residential buildings are not required to be registered individually. However, if the entire multi-tenant building is vacant, the building must be registered.
4. A parcel of land that does not have buildings.

Q: Is the city’s list of registered vacant buildings public information?

A: *No. The city of Crystal does not release its list of registered vacant buildings because it is “security information” classified as confidential under Minnesota Statutes section 13.37.*

Q: Where can I get more information?

A: *Complete information and all forms are available on the city’s website at www.crystalmn.gov. You also may obtain the necessary forms and a copy of “Vacant Building Registration At-A-Glance” by calling Crystal City Hall at 763-531-1000.*